



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature  
by  
Theresa Friday  
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## Confederate rose by any other name is a hibiscus

The large, beautiful blooms of the Confederate rose are real attention grabbers in early October. The common name can be misleading because this plant is neither a confederate (it hails from China), nor a rose (it's in the Malvaceae or hibiscus family).

Botanically, it is *Hibiscus mutabilis* and is an old fashioned garden plant of the southern U.S. It was growing in European gardens by 1690 and was planted widely in 19th century American gardens.

The common name most likely relates to the plant's use in the South and the resemblance of its flowers to old-fashioned garden roses. Or, perhaps it was named so because Southerners used it to decorate cemeteries after the Civil War.

Confederate rose grows and blooms best in full sun. The plant needs moist, well-drained soil. Its roots are hardy along the Gulf Coast, but freezing weather normally kills the above ground parts of the plant. The roots however, will generate new stems and leaves in the spring.



Depending upon how much it freezes back each winter, it makes a large shrub or small, multi-trunked tree up to 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide. To minimize cold damage, locate plants in warmer areas of the landscape. Choose planting sites that are protected on the north side by the house or solid fences. Heavy mulches of leaves, bark or pine needles applied during the fall help to protect roots and the plant crown, as well as helping to ensure that complete recovery will occur the following spring.

The vegetative growth of confederate rose during the spring and summer is not particularly striking. The leaves are large and coarse. They look a little like the standard hibiscus, but more like cotton or okra, to which it is also closely related.

Flowers initiate on new growth. In late summer, flower buds appear atop each stem. They look somewhat like cotton bolls, providing this plant with yet another common name—the cotton rose. The buds open into large, showy flowers producing six to eighth inch blooms that open white and fade to pink. One of its most notable features is that white, light pink and dark pink flowers can be found at the same time on any given plant.

The most common form is 'Flora Plena' with double flowers, but a single-flowered form also can be found. Another cultivar of this species, *H. mutabilis*, Rubra, is a smaller statured plant (usually four to six feet in height) with single intense deep pink to carmine blooms.

Propagation is easy. Start new plants from seed in the spring, or root eight inch long terminal cuttings during spring, summer and early fall. Cuttings can be rooted in a conventional propagation bed, or even in a glass of water.

Although generally pest-free, Confederate rose is a favorite host for whiteflies that cause leaves to yellow and drop. They also may become covered with a black sooty mold because of insect activity. Control whiteflies and sooty mold as needed with a horticultural oil spray. As always, be sure to follow label directions.



Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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